

My name is Joe Hermann, I am a resident of West Hartford, a tenant, and a volunteer organizer with Connecticut Tenants Union. I am here to testify in support of SB 4 with amendments for a stronger rent cap and good cause protections, as well as in support of HB 6781, section 11, for eviction records reform.

In my organizing with Connecticut tenants, I've seen how skyrocketing rents and landlord greed have pushed tenants to the brink of personal disaster. Rent caps are a necessity for keeping our communities together and to prevent the further erosion of living conditions that tenants have long suffered in a system that favors landlords at every turn.

The bill as it stands needs to be stronger. A 4% plus inflation cap will not do enough to keep people in their homes. This number should be amended to 2.5%.

Furthermore, it is imperative that we add good cause eviction protections to SB 4, as well as rent stabilization between tenants. Without such protections landlords will continue to use predatory tactics to retaliate against tenants that organize for dignified housing and they will use evictions to evade rent stabilization.

In addition to rent caps and good cause protections, sealing eviction records is also a necessity. To that end, I am writing in support of HB 6781, Section 11, with the recommendation that the language be strengthened such that all eviction records are sealed, not just those older than five years, and that any action that uses eviction records to deny someone housing is considered a discriminatory practice. During my organizing, I've seen tenants evicted as retaliation for asserting their right to safe and healthy housing, and I've seen the struggle to attain housing because of these eviction records. Without new protections, homelessness will continue to rise as tenants are forced to contend with extremely limited housing supply and unchecked landlord power.

Enacting these protections are a first step towards a housing system oriented towards people, not profit. Landlords used the pandemic as an excuse to boost profits by avoiding repairs, landlords had their Payment Protection Program loans fully forgiven, landlords took UniteCT money only to evict tenants at the first opportunity. These same landlords are now raising rents by hundreds of dollars a month while giving tenants nothing in return. We will certainly hear today how not all landlords are like this, but good policy is concerned with systems. What we have is a system where landlords crush tenants for profit with impunity, where those who rent aren't human beings, but numbers in a ledger. If landlords do not see the returns they'd like on their investment, they have the luxury of selling their units for exorbitant prices in today's housing market, prices that tend to rise with inflation, unlike workers' wages.

Should these laws pass, landlords will not go hungry. Landlords will not be evicted from their homes. Landlords will not have to relocate their children to new school districts. Enacting these laws is urgent and will help move us towards a world that guarantees everyone access to a safe, healthy, and dignified home.